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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the role of emotional skills in the academic achievement and retention of university freshmen. The research group was a randomly selected sample of first semester freshmen students (N=165), and cumulative grade point average was used as the criterion for academic success. The study was designed to investigate: (a) the relationship of emotional skills to academic achievement and retention, (b) gender and ethnicity differences in emotional skills, and (c) the emotional skill patterns of successful and unsuccessful freshmen. The results of the study indicate that the emotional skills of Time Management, Goal Achievement, and Assertive Communication were significant factors in freshmen achievement and retention. (Contains 19 references and 7 tables.) (Author)

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Running Head: Emotional Intelligence Skills

Emotional Intelligence Skills:

Significant Factors in Freshmen Achievement and Retention

Darwin B. Nelson

Texas A&M University-Kingsville

Kaye W. Nelson

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

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Darwin B. Nelson is a Professor of Education at Texas A&M University-Kingsville, and Kaye W. Nelson is an Associate Professor of Counseling at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

The results of this research were presented March 24 at a poster session at the 2003 annual of the 2003 American Counseling Association, Anaheim, CA. We thank Yvonne Castillo, Research Assistant, for her help in the presentation of the research results. Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to Darwin B. Nelson, TAMU-K, Department of Education, Rhode Hall # 103, MSC 196, Kingsville, TX 78363 <Darwin.Nelson@tamuk.edu>

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Abstract

This study investigated the role of emotional skills in the academic achievement and retention of university freshmen. The research group was a randomly selected sample of first semester freshmen students (N= 165), and cumulative grade point average was used as the criterion for academic success. The study was designed to investigate: (a) the relationship of emotional skills to academic achievement and retention, (b) gender and ethnicity differences in emotional skills, and (c) the emotional skill patterns of successful and unsuccessful freshmen. The results of the study indicate that the emotional skills of Time Management, Goal Achievement, and Assertive Communication were significant factors in freshmen achievement and retention.

Introduction

Current retention models often overlook the influence of non-intellective (emotional intelligence) skills on academic success and persistence in a university environment. The work of Gardner (1983), Seligman (1990), Salovey and Mayer (1990), and Goleman (1995) has focused attention on the importance of emotional intelligence in personal, academic, and career effectiveness.

Chickering (1972, 1993) has emphasized emotional skills as major factors of college student development. Brower's (1990) research indicates that students experience stress and need coping strategies to adjust to higher education. Upcraft and Gardner (1989) suggest that personal skill development is helpful in assisting students to succeed in college. Barefoot and Fidler (1996) have reported that the goals of freshmen seminar programs nationally emphasize the development of emotional skills in the intrapersonal, interpersonal and career/life management dimensions. Materials developed for freshman seminar programs often include emotional skill development (Gardner and Jewler, 2003; Nelson & Low, 2002). Gardner and Van Der Veer (1998) have indicated that emotional skills such as (a) assertive communication, (b) problem solving, (c) time management, (d) goal setting, and (e) stress management are emphasized and highly valued by employers of college graduates. A literature review reflects that research has not clearly established a relationship and/or the importance of emotional skills to freshmen achievement and retention.

The purpose of this study was to operationally define emotional intelligence skills and investigate their role in the achievement and retention of freshmen students at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. The study was viewed as a preliminary step in conceptualizing a research based assessment and emotional skill development program that could be offered by the University Counseling Center as a personal development component of the Freshmen Seminar.

Method

The Personal Achievement Skills System (PASS; Nelson & Pierce) was selected to identify, operationally define, and quantify the emotional intelligence skills of: (a) Self-Efficacy, (b) Stress Management, (c) Rapport, (d) Empathy, (e) Goal Achievement, (f) Time Management, (g) Problem Solution, (h) Assertion, (i) Anger Control, (j) Anxiety Management and (k) Personal Satisfaction (well being). The PASS was developed from a cognitive behavioral model and has been extensively field tested in a variety of educational settings (Nelson & Pierce, 1988). Doctoral level research has indicated that PASS scales could be effectively used to identify important emotional skill factors that could be linked to specific intervention and skill development programs (Fry, 1990; Hale, 1986; Link, 1982; Quintanilla, 1998; Tennant, 1990; Welsh, 1985).

Procedures

The PASS was administered to a random sample (N= 165) of first semester students enrolled in the Freshmen Seminar (see Table 1). Individual emotional skill profiles were developed and interpreted as a self-awareness and personal learning experience for each student. The PASS assessment (30 minutes) and follow-up interpretation (one hour) was completed as a voluntary personal development component of the Freshmen Seminar in the Fall Semester of 1994.

At the completion of the Spring Semester of 1998 four years later, the cumulative GPA for each student in the research sample (N=165) was obtained and used as the criterion for academic success. A stepwise regression model was used to establish the relationship of gender, ethnicity, and emotional skills to academic achievement. A one-way classification analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the effects of gender and ethnicity on emotional skill levels. As shown in Tables 2 and 3, students in the sample achieving a cumulative GPA of 3.5 or above

were designated as "high achieving" (N=30), and students with a cumulative GPA of 1.99 or below as "low achieving" (N=35). Students' t test for independent samples was used to determine whether or not "high" or "low" achievers differed significantly in emotional skill levels when they entered the university as freshmen in the Fall Semester of 1994.

In May of 1998, a small group (N= 15) graduated after completing eight regular semesters at the University. This group was defined as "Persistent Achievers" (see Table 4). A descriptive profile was constructed to reflect characteristic emotional skills and achievement levels for this group.

Instrumentation

The Personal Achievement Skills System (PASS) is a 110-item self assessment instrument providing scale specific measures of (a) Self Efficacy, (b) Stress management, (c) Rapport, (d) Empathy, (e) Goal Achievement, (f) Time Management, (g) Problem Solving, (g) Assertion, (i) Anger Control, (j) Anxiety Management, and (k) Personal Satisfaction. Each scale contains ten items that are answered individually by indicating a numerical value of 1 through 7 ranging from always false to always true. Each item is a clear description of personal behavior. See Appendix for skill dimensions and scale definitions.

The major value of the PASS is a positive assessment and emotional learning model. The PASS assessment was used to identify the individual emotional skill strengths and weaknesses for each student. The PASS profile guide and interpretive session focused on understanding emotional skills at a personal level. The role of gender and ethnicity factors in the assessment and interpretation of emotional skills and the predictive validity of the PASS scales were important aspects of this study.

Results

The major findings of the study are briefly summarized in the statements that follow.

(1) The emotional skills of Time Management and Assertive Communication were significant predictors of academic achievement when cumulative GPA was used as the criterion (see Table 5).

(2) The gender factor, female, was a significant predictor of academic achievement in this research sample. When included in the regression equation with the emotional skills of Time Management and Assertive Communication, the three factors explained twelve percent (12%) of the total variance in cumulative GPA see Table 6).

(3) Ethnicity was a significant factor in the emotional skill of Time Management with Caucasian freshmen in general reporting higher Time Management Skills than Hispanic freshmen.

(4) Gender was a significant factor in the emotional skills of Rapport, Empathy, Problem Solving, and Anger Control with females reporting significantly higher skills in Rapport, Empathy, and Anger Control and males reporting higher skills in Problem Solving.

(5) When they entered the University as first semester freshmen in the Fall of 1994, high achieving students scored high on the emotional skills of Goal Achievement, Time Management, and Personal Satisfaction as determined by the Students' t test for independent samples.

(6) Persistent achievers had a characteristic pattern of emotional skills (see Table 4) with strengths claimed in Positive Self-Efficacy, Assertive Communication, Rapport, Empathy, and Time Management skills.

Emotional skills as measured by the PASS (Nelson & Pierce, 1988) were significant factors in the achievement and retention of freshmen at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. Gender and ethnicity factors significantly influenced scale specific measures of emotional skills on the Personal Achievement Skills System. As seen in Table 7, all emotional skills are related to each

other. All correlations of PASS scales in this research sample were significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion

The findings of this study suggested that emotional skills, as measured by the Personal Achievement Skills System (Nelson & Pierce, 1988), were significant factors in freshmen achievement and retention. Specifically, Time Management and Assertive Communication skills were significant predictors of academic success in this research sample when cumulative GPA was the criterion.

The emotional skills of Goal Achievement and Time Management significantly differentiated high and low achieving groups in this study. Persistent Achievers demonstrated a characteristic pattern of emotional skills and were significantly higher than their low achieving classmates in Self Efficacy, Assertive Communication, Rapport, Empathy, Time Management, and Goal Achievement skills.

The findings of the study also suggested the need to consider gender factors in the assessment of emotional skills. In this research sample, females and males assessed Rapport, Empathy, Problem Solving and Anger Control skills differently. Rapport, Empathy and Anger Control skills were significantly higher for females and Problem Solving skills were significantly higher for males. Gender specific norms may improve the value of the Personal Achievement Skills System (PASS) when being used with university students.

Emotional skills are very important factors in the achievement and retention of university freshmen. The Personal Achievement Skills System (PASS) provides a brief and positive self-assessment approach that helps students identify and understand some of the emotional skills important to personal, academic, and career success. If emotional skills can be identified and emphasized as a part of the freshmen seminar, preventive intervention strategies can be

developed to help students learn and develop specific behaviors important to achievement and retention. Emotional skill development requires systematic and in-depth intervention. University Counseling Centers can develop skills training experiences to improve the achievement and retention of all students. Systematic skills training programs in the areas of Time Management, Assertive Communication, and Personal Goal Setting may be especially important in improving freshmen achievement and retention.

Emotional intelligence is a key factor in academic success in a university environment. Emotional skills can be learned and developed to improve academic achievement and retention. When cumulative GPA was the criterion, initial research on TAMU-CC freshmen indicated that Time Management and Assertive Communication Skills were significant predictors of academic achievement and persistence at our university. Goal Achievement, Time Management and Personal Satisfaction scales were found to be significantly different in high and low achieving groups. As freshmen, high achieving students had significantly higher goal Achievement, time Management and Personal Satisfaction scores when compared to low achieving students. Additional research is needed to enhance understanding of the impact of emotional intelligence on academic success and to provide assistance in improving intervention programs to reduce attrition and increase academic success of college freshmen.

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Table 1

Emotional Skill Characteristics: Freshman Sample

PASS SCALE	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
Self Efficacy (SE)	55.7	7.0
Stress Management (SM)	46.8	9.5
Rapport (R)	55.4	7.0
Empathy (E)	55.3	7.5
Goal Achievement (GA)	49.1	8.8
Time Management (TM)	47.9	9.7
Problem Solving (PS)	51.6	8.7
Assertion (A)	52.9	8.0
Anger Control (AC)	50.5	9.9
Anxiety Management (AM)	51.2	8.0
Personal Satisfaction (PSa)	51.6	7.3

N = 165

Note: These data were used to develop institutional specific norms for the Personal Achievement Skills System (PASS; Nelson & Pierce, 1988). The PASS was the self-assessment approach used to identify and profile emotional skills for each student in the research sample. The PASS Skill Scales were used to identify, operational define, and quantify emotional skills in this research sample.

Table 2

Emotional Skills Scores of High Achieving Freshmen

PASS SCALES	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self Efficacy	30	44.00	65.00	57.7	5.9
Stress Management	30	28.00	65.00	48.6	9.3
Rapport	30	42.00	67.00	56.3	6.6
Empathy	30	43.00	70.00	56.0	7.3
Goal Achievement	30	40.00	65.00	53.5	6.1
Time Management	30	36.00	66.00	52.9	8.2
Problem Solving	30	40.00	65.00	54.4	7.6
Assertion	30	41.00	67.00	55.0	6.8
Anger Control	30	35.00	70.00	53.8	7.4
Anxiety management	30	33.00	64.00	52.5	8.3
Personal Satisfaction	30	37.00	66.00	54.4	6.7

Note. High achieving = GPA 3.5 to 4.5

Table 3

Emotional Skills Scores of Low Achieving Freshman

PASS SCALES	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self Efficacy	35	36.00	70.00	55.2	7.7
Stress Management	35	21.00	66.00	47.2	11.9
Rapport	35	33.00	67.00	55.6	7.8
Empathy	35	31.00	68.00	55.6	8.0
Goal Achievement	35	31.00	70.00	48.4	8.3
Time Management	35	18.00	60.00	45.6	9.8
Problem Solving	35	28.00	67.00	51.5	9.5
Assertion	35	34.00	69.00	54.6	7.7
Anger Control	35	11.00	66.00	49.5	11.0
Anxiety management	35	23.00	67.00	51.7	8.4
Personal Satisfaction	35	32.00	65.00	50.9	7.2

Note. Low Achieving = GPA 1 to 1.999

Table 4

Persistent Achievers: An Emotional Skills Profile

PASS SCALES	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Self Efficacy	15	57.20	4.20	1.08
Stress Management	15	50.40	5.30	1.37
Rapport	15	56.60	5.10	1.32
Empathy	15	55.27	4.57	1.18
Goal Achievement	15	52.60	4.55	1.17
Time Management	15	53.67	6.42	1.66
Problem Solving	15	54.27	5.7	1.44
Assertion	15	54.00	4.54	1.17
Anger Control	15	53.93	4.81	1.50
Anxiety management	15	52.07	5.15	1.33
Personal Satisfaction	15	53.87	3.66	0.95

NOTE: Fifteen members of the 1994 charter freshmen research sample (N=164) graduated on time (eight regular semesters) in May 1998. These "persistent achievers" had a characteristic emotional skill profile when they entered the University. Their self-assessed levels of emotional skills were significantly higher than the skill levels of their classmates who did not graduate in four years. Positive Self-Efficacy, Assertive Communication, Rapport, Empathy, and Time Management skills were characteristics of persistent achievers.

Table 5

Significant Gender, Ethnicity, and Emotional Intelligence Predictors of Academic Success

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change of Statistics				
					R Square change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.228[a]	.052	.046	.8664	.052	8.955	1	163	.003
2	.316[b]	.100	.089	.8469	.048	8.594	1	162	.004
3	.349[c]	.122	.106	.8389	.022	4.178	1	161	.045

Note. N = 165

[a]Predictors: (Constant), FEMALE

[b]Predictors: (Constant), FEMALE , SCALE 6 Time Management

[c] Predictors: (Constant), FEMALE , SCALE 6 Time Management, SCALE 8 Assertion

Table 6

ANOVA[d] Results: Significant Effects of Gender and Ethnicity on Emotional Intelligence Skills

MODEL		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6.721	1	6.721	8.955	.003[a]
	Residual	122.343	163	.751		
	Total	129.065	164			
2	Regression	12.884	2	6.442	8.983	.000[b]
	Residual	116.180	162	.717		
	Total	129.065	164			
3	Regression	15.754	3	5.251	7.462	.000[c]
	Residual	113.311	161	.704		
	Total	129.065	164			

Note. N = 165

[a]Predictors: (Constant), FEMALE

[b]Predictors: (Constant), FEMALE, SCALE 6 Time Management

[c]Predictors: (Constant), FEMALE, SCALE 6 Time Management, SCALE 8 Assertion

[d]Dependent Variable: CUMULATIVE GPA

Table 7

Personal Achievement Skills System: Intercorelational Matrix

PASS SCALE	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Self Efficacy (SE)	.64	.58	.53	.62	.52	.70	.61	.61	.69	.78
Stress Management (SM)		.58	.53	.36	.34	.60	.48	.66	.65	.65
Rapport (R)			.75	.35	.21	.62	.56	.57	.56	.56
Empathy (E)				.32	.25	.56	.38	.63	.44	.55
Goal Achievement (GA)					.71	.49	.52	.28	.40	.67
Time Management (TM)						.42	.46	.25	.37	.63
Problem Solving (PS)							.65	.46	.65	.59
Assertion (A)								.33	.71	.61
Anger Control (AC)									.57	.60
Anxiety Management (AM)										.71
Personal Satisfaction (PSa)										

Note. N = 165. All correlations of PASS scales in this research sample were significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). The PASS scales may be related to a similar, but more general factor, such as self-confidence and/or self-management. Additional research is needed to establish the scale specific contributions of self-assessed PASS skills.

Appendix

Personal Achievement Skills System (Nelson & Pierce, 1988)

Skill Dimensions and Scales Definitions

Skill Dimension I: INTRAPERSONAL SKILLS -The personal attitude and belief system within the individual. Self Evaluation. Self Expectancy-beliefs about self and one's ability to perform successfully in specific situations Self-regulation of emotions

SCALE 1: *Self Efficacy (SE)* -One's ability to view self as competent and potentially successful in accomplishing personal goals Self Confidence

SCALE 2: *Stress Management* (SM) -One's ability to choose and exercise healthy self control in response to stressful events Self-regulation of emotional intensity and the use of cognitively derived coping strategies in difficult and high stress situations

Skill Dimension II: INTERPERSONAL SKILLS - Specific behaviors and skills essential to productive and healthy relationships with others. Specific skills of rapport, empathy, and assertion.

SCALE 3: *Rapport (R)* -The ability to impact others positively and develop trust and comfort in relationships

SCALE 4: *Empathy (E)* -The ability to accurately understand and constructively respond to the expressed feelings, thoughts, and needs of others

Skill Dimension III: LIFE/CAREER MANAGEMENT SKILLS - Skills for productively managing life and work demands on a daily basis. The specific skills of goal achievement, time management, and problem solving

SCALE 5. *Goal/Achievement (GA)* -The ability to clearly establish meaningful personal goals and focus and direct high levels of personal energy for goal

achievement and personal satisfaction

SCALE 6: *Time Management (TM)* -The ability to organize tasks in a personally productive time schedule and use time effectively for task completion

SCALE 7: *Problem Solving (PS)* -The ability to establish and implement effective decision making and conflict resolution strategies

Skill Dimension IV: COMMUNICATION SKILLS - Related skills of rapport and empathy. Skilled interpersonal communication in verbal and non-verbal interactions with others. Specific skill of assertive communication.

SCALE 8. *Assertion (A)* -The ability to clearly and powerfully communicate thoughts and feelings to others in a straight-forward and direct manner skilled communication

SCALE 9: *Anger Control (AC)* -The ability to express anger constructively in relationship to self and others.

SCALE 10: *Anxiety Management (AM)* -The ability to manage self-imposed anxiety and effectively communicate with others

Skill Dimension V: BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT - Self assessment of one's perceived level of satisfaction with current behaviors.

SCALE 11: *Personal Satisfaction (PSa)* -The ability to know and accurately evaluate oneself in terms of specific strengths and weaknesses

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